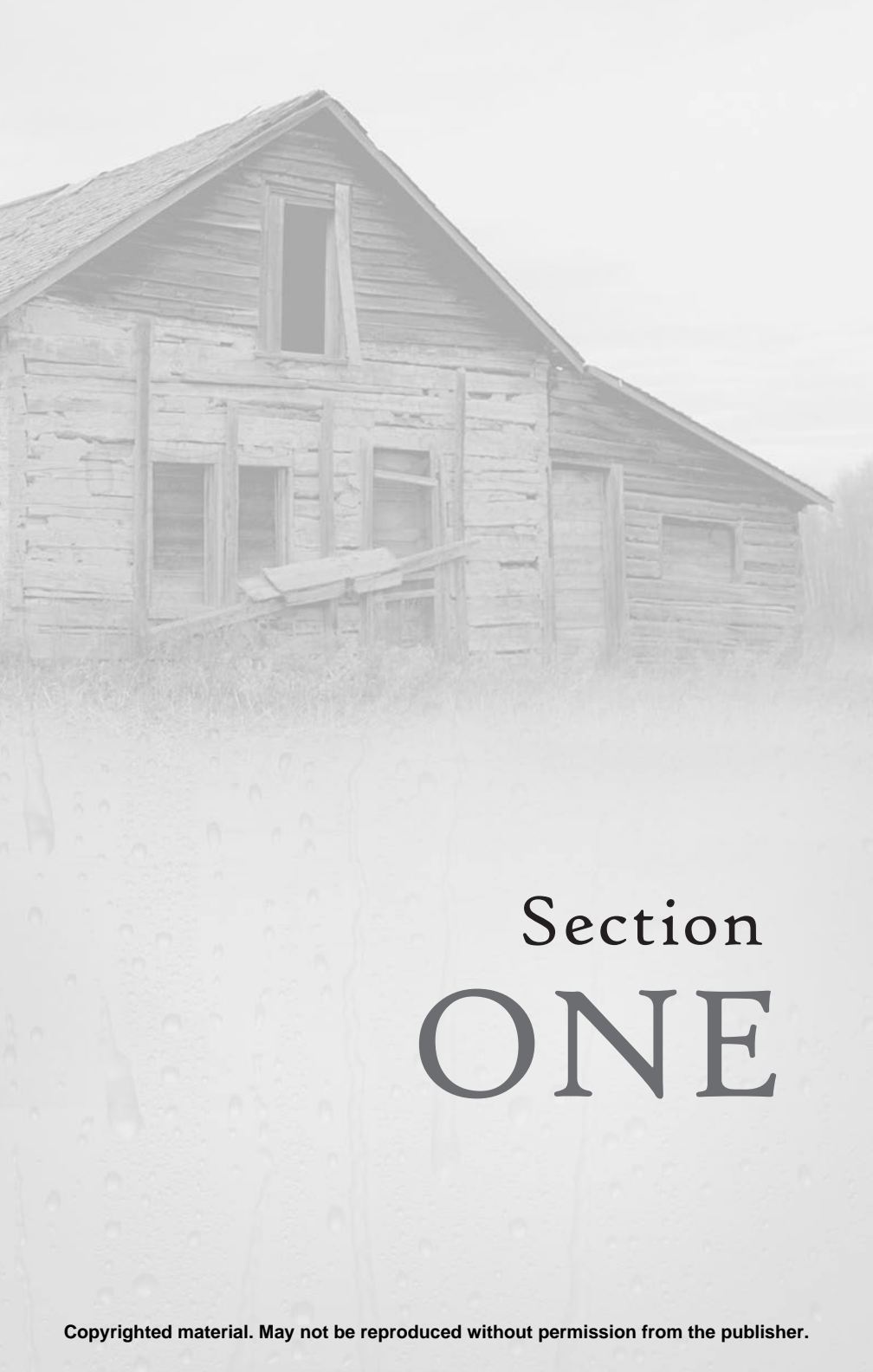


# contents

## SECTION ONE

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# Section ONE

## Chapter I

# Native Roots

JUNE 1936

Meadow Flower tore past the rickety fence and pounded down the narrow hard-packed path, her black hair streaming behind her in the wind. She dared not look back at the weathered log house to check if Mother had seen her slip away. Past haystacks, drying in the field, and across the blistering hot pasture she raced. The savage heat sapped her breath, and brittle grass crunched underfoot. Golden weeds swished against her brown legs, and all the while, the terrible, never-ending hunger pains gnawed her stomach.

She had to find something to eat, to get away from the heat—and to get away from Mother. Had to or she'd bust!

At last she reached the creek. This was a place that she and Daddy loved. Panting from her hard run, she swept her hair back from her sweaty face and looked up and down the banks, trying to find him.

Her stomach rumbled. Meadow Flower plunged down the bank into the rippling water. Her skinny arms splashed through the cool wetness as she searched the smooth, flat rocks of the creek bed. All these little pools! Maybe she'd find fish swimming in one of them. If she could catch a fish, she'd eat it—she was so hungry. But she didn't know how to catch one without a fishing pole. Daddy did. *Where is he?* she wondered. *He must be somewhere here along the water keeping cool. He'll tell me how to do it the Indian way. Maybe he'll even help me fry it over a fire.*

She cupped her hands around her mouth and called, "Dadd-y-y-y!"

There he came, tall and lean in his ragged bib overalls, plodding along the creek bank. His arms hung limply by his side, his straw hat tipped down over his forehead, and his shoulders stooped.

"Daddy, let's catch fish. I'm starving!" Suddenly Daddy stumbled. His face turned a sickly white. Meadow Flower's heart lurched. She rushed forward and grabbed his arm. "Daddy, what's wrong?"

Slowly Daddy lowered himself to the ground and leaned against a tree trunk. He gasped for air. "Heat's bad . . . fer my heart. Makes . . . me . . . lousy."

Meadow Flower panicked. Though Daddy often felt bad, in all her nine years, he'd never been this sick. He

was older than most other girls' dads. He seemed more like a grandpa—old and worn-out and not able to work, even though their family had almost nothing.

"You rest. I'll cool you off." Meadow Flower snatched his tattered handkerchief from his pocket and jumped down the bank to the creek. She dragged the handkerchief through the water and wrung it out. Then she climbed back up the bank and wiped the dripping handkerchief across Daddy's face.

"That helps." Daddy took the handkerchief, dampened his neck, and leaned his head back against the tree trunk. "What'd I do without my Meadow Flower?"

She wrinkled her nose at him, but delight spread through her. Daddy would be all right. Meadow Flower sat down beside him. His nearness calmed her. Even if she couldn't read, even if the other children called her poor white trash, Daddy loved her!

Daddy's chest rose and fell in long steady breaths. When he shifted for a better spot, Meadow Flower leaned forward. "Gonna help me catch fish now? You know, like catching them with your hands?"

"Nope."

Meadow Flower frowned. "Why? I'm starving. I wanna catch fish now!"

Daddy breathed long and slow. "The creek's too low. Ain't no fish."

Meadow Flower stood up. She didn't want Daddy to see the tears of disappointment filling her eyes. Her stomach rumbled in another long growl.